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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT TRIET FOCUSES ON
STRENGTHENING TIES, HUMAN RIGHTS

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11. (SBU) Summary: In his July 31 farewell call on Vietnam's President Nguyen Minh Triet, the Ambassador noted the significant progress in bilateral economic and commercial ties as well as increased USG support for the GVN's reform efforts, while cautioning that important human rights concerns remain. There is room to increase our cooperation on education, the Ambassador said, in part by establishing a Peace Corps program in Vietnam. The Ambassador sought Triet's support for a new U.S. embassy building in Hanoi - Triet agreed to ask the relevant agencies to facilitate this. The Ambassador and Triet addressed human rights at length. Triet agreed that an ongoing dialogue is vital to addressing the issue, and said Vietnam was "hurt" by high-level USG meetings with dissidents. The Ambassador acknowledged that Vietnam's treatment of land protesters was more lenient than some reports in the overseas press, and noted the importance of allowing Mission Vietnam officers access to information on the ground. The Ambassador underscored that Vietnam needed greater transparency, however, including through press freedoms, to effectively ensure that observers understand the situation here. End Summary.

STRONG TIES, AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

12. (SBU) In his fifty minute farewell call with Ambassador Marine on July 31, President Nguyen Minh Triet said he was sorry to say goodbye, noting the great advancements in U.S.-Vietnam ties during the Ambassador's three-year tenure. The Ambassador agreed that there has been significant progress on many fronts, noting that only six years ago the bilateral trade agreement came into effect and now the United States is Vietnam's biggest market. Our economic ties have created a strong base which we continue to grow, the Ambassador said, but there are other areas where our relations have not reached their full potential.

13. (SBU) The Ambassador noted that the U.S. Government has increased the amount of grants to Vietnam from USD 50 million when he took his post three years ago to over USD 95 million at present. Those funds support the STAR program to support Vietnam's ongoing government reforms, buy drugs for people with AIDS and help Vietnam fight Avian Influenza. These funds also support efforts to address legacy issues from the war: unexploded ordinance and now some environmental issues related to dioxin. Triet said Vietnam is thankful for U.S. assistance in these areas, and added that Vietnam is also cooperating with the United States on recovering its soldiers mission in action.

14. (SBU) A strong, stable Vietnam is vital to U.S. interests in this part of the world, the Ambassador said. With Vietnam likely to join the UN Security Council as a nonpermanent member in 2008, we will

have to deepen our dialogue to deal with issues like North Korea, Burma and Darfur. The Ambassador noted that President Bush has raised issues related to Iran's nuclear program with Triet in the White House last June. This would be another issue on which we will be sharing information, the Ambassador told Triet.

15. (SBU) To facilitate our expanded ties, the Ambassador said that we may be formally proposing that we open a consulate in Danang in the future, and that we understand the GVN wants to open more consulates in the U.S. - this is what should happen as our ties deepen. We urgently need a new U.S. embassy building in Hanoi, the Ambassador stressed - just as Vietnam needs a new embassy building in Washington. At this point, we need a counter-offer from the GVN; simply saying our initial offer was too low does not advance the process. Triet said he "totally agreed" on the need for a new embassy and would ask the relevant agencies to move forward on this.

EXPANDING EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGES: PEACE CORPS CAN HELP

16. (SBU) Noting that Vietnamese leaders are working to improve the education system, the Ambassador said that we are helping, and can do more. He mentioned our thriving Fulbright program and the Vietnam Education Foundation. The number of Vietnamese students at all levels studying in the States is up 25 percent over last year, but still only around 4,500 - that number could easily be doubled or tripled, the Ambassador told Triet. Private American universities are also setting up partnerships in Vietnam, the Ambassador noted, a trend we should try to reinforce.

17. (SBU) The Ambassador noted that one of the obstacles to increased educational exchanges is the lack of English language ability, and we continue to hope we can establish a Peace Corps program in Vietnam, which could help address this problem. President Triet said "the direction to establish a Peace Corps program in Vietnam is set," and all that remains is the concrete implementation of the program. Triet went on that language ability is not the only issue;

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the cost of an education in the United States is also high for Vietnamese and a barrier for seeking opportunities there. The Ambassador suggested that the Fulbright program could expand if the Vietnamese government is willing to provide some financial support. With more U.S. institutions setting up operations in Vietnam, the cost of the programs will be cheaper than study in the United States. and should be an important area of possible emphasis, the Ambassador said.

18. (SBU) Triet agreed that we have had great achievements in the relationship; in just a few days he will be welcoming to Vietnam representatives of some major corporations with whom he met during his recent visit to the U.S. In other areas we have obstacles remaining, but if we work together we can overcome these. President Bush said he had committed USD three million for Agent Orange cleanup efforts and this was a good start, Triet noted. The Ambassador agreed we must work together to make these efforts a success - we have a solid foundation on the environmental issues but more must be done on the human health side and both are important.

VIETNAM "HURT" BY MEETINGS WITH DISSIDENTS

19. (SBU) The Ambassador raised democracy and human rights issues several times during the discussion, underscoring that we need to discuss our differences frankly and constructively. The Ambassador recalled that President Triet told President Bush during his recent visit to the United States that dialogue in this area is very important. We were encouraged by the positive GVN response to Senator Patrick Leahy's March letter to Triet outlining interest by the U.S. Congress in expanding our cooperation in promoting the rule of law and good governance. We now need to translate this consensus into concrete efforts, which could deal, for example, with corruption and accountability and other items high on the GVN's agenda.

¶10. (SBU) Triet recalled that he had discussed human rights and democracy with President Bush as well as members of Congress. In these discussions, he had pointed out that Vietnam had suffered a long history of war, during which human rights did not exist and the people lived in misery. Now the GVN fully understands human rights and their importance. This does not, however, mean that persons would be allowed to break the law and go unpunished. Triet acknowledged that there is a gap between U.S. and Vietnamese law on this subject, adding that Vietnam's laws need to be improved, and stated that further dialogue is needed in order that we understand each other. Triet then recalled that, shortly before his own visit to Washington, President Bush met with four people called "dissidents." This was not a problem, Triet said, but then after his visit the NSC also met with an additional dissident. "It hurts us," Triet asserted, calling again for direct dialogue "so we can work together on this issue on a very fair and candid basis." You can see all the churches in Vietnam are open and people are free to worship, Triet said.

¶11. (SBU) The Ambassador agreed that there is a need to deepen our understanding of each other's positions. He said that it is normal for the President and members of his NSC staff to meet with individuals holding a range of views. We look forward to the day when the GVN will be more open to listening to its critics. Listening does not mean the GVN necessarily does what its critics want, but it should give them an opportunity to express their views. Openness will make Vietnam stronger, he told Triet.

GETTING OUT THE TRUTH ON LAND PROTESTS

¶12. (SBU) Responding to the Ambassador's point, Triet indicated that the GVN understands the value of listening to those with complaints. Citing the recent demonstrations in Ho Chi Minh City regarding land issues, Triet said that Vietnamese leaders had instructed provincial officials to meet with the protesters, resolve their concerns and convince them to go home. There are some who say we oppressed these people, Triet said, but the fact protests were allowed to last for many weeks proves otherwise. Even in the United States, people must ask permission to stage demonstrations and abide by time limits.

¶13. (SBU) The Ambassador noted that officers from the Embassy and our Consulate in Ho Chi Minh City had followed the land protests closely. Because we have been able to interact with a range of individuals, U.S. policy makers understand how the GVN approached the HCMC demonstrations, and that some of the accusations of the GVN posted on the internet were not accurate. The Ambassador noted that a small group of people may still be detained, and we would like the GVN to engage in a dialogue about their cases. The Ambassador also noted that Vietnam would benefit from a strong and free media, which can also be an ally in getting out the word about changes in

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Vietnam, as well as helping the GVN improve governance overall.

¶14. (SBU) The Ambassador concluded that his most important job in Vietnam has been strengthening mutual understanding between our two peoples and that he leaves knowing the people of Vietnam understand that the United States wants a strong, independent, open Vietnam. To build these same ties in the United States will take outreach to the Vietnamese community there, the Ambassador said. President Triet's outreach during his recent visit to the United States was seen as very successful, the Ambassador said, and he encouraged President Triet to continue this process, including during another visit the United States later during his tenure.

MARINE